Chapter 2

St. Gregory Palamas as the Response of Orthodox Mystical Theology to (Neo-)Platonist and Aristotelian Metaphysics

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Introduction

In what follows, I will discuss some of the major themes in David Bradshaw's book *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge 2004). I will review what I see as the positive contributions of the work in the current debates and I will discuss some of the possible concerns it raises for an Orthodox-friendly philosophy and theology. I will close with some personal thoughts about the future of these debates and possible lines of further research. In my discussion, I will not follow the path of a critical review or a critical notice: my goal is not only to review and discuss the importance of Bradshaw's book for any such contemporary investigation, but also to go further in advancing my own theses in the area (which differ somewhat from Bradshaw's, both in scope and in vision). It is my stance (which has been an ongoing research project for many years) that the perspective presented by the mystical and hesychastic philosophy and theology of St. Gregory Palamas provides a valid response to some of the key dilemmas in both the (Neo-)Platonist and Aristotelian metaphysics and the contemporary metaphysics, epistemology, logic and ethics related to the existence, essence and energies of God.

1 David Bradshaw's Aristotle: East or West and why?

Let us start with a discussion about the place of Bradshaw's book in today's cultural and philosophical milieu.

Perhaps few authors have been the target of so many purposefully wrong interpretations down the centuries as Plato and Aristotle. Core doctrines and theses have been isolated, de-contextualised and ferociously attacked; they have been championed in personal or collective school wars and defended by famous philosophers and theologians down the centuries. In the more recent debates on Plato and Aristotle, the majority of the discussions are theme and context-specific. By this I

mean that the majority of the discussions are either metaphysical/logical or political/ethical, with any epistemological concerns carefully fitted within the boundaries of the above broad conjunctions of thematic areas. Through the eyes of followers of Hume and Descartes, Locke and Berkeley, Kant and Hegel, the two great giants, Plato and Aristotle, have been 're-invented', 're-interpreted', and meticulously 'translated' and thus 're-authored', so that today's reader of some of their core esoteric texts cannot discern where Hume ends and where Aristotle begins, where Hegel and Kant abstract and schematize, and where Plato specifies and defines.

Our era of the analytic vs. continental meta-divide is creating even more problems than it originally tried to overcome through the 'radical' re-interpretations of Plato and Aristotle. Even the most earnest of attempts to 'deconstruct' the empiricist and the rationalist agendas of the post-modern approaches to Plato and Aristotle prove unable to resist the analytic/continental appropriations, thus leading the contemporary students of Plato and Aristotle to consider key Platonic and Aristotelian texts as alien, bizarre and idiosyncratic. Esoteric school debates and chief worries about what defines our diachronic human nature thus become unable to fit modern research agendas and the fetich of the ephemeral, i.e., the 'footnote in the works of giants'.

So, contemporary scholars interested in the diachronic (but also creative) reception of Plato and Aristotle see with great interest attempts to come to terms with the philosophical and theological influence of Aristotle in the divided (for more than 1500 years now) Eastern and Western parts of our European Civilization.[1]

This endeavour may look fresh in the sense of being a novel approach in the face of contemporary standardized philosophical clichés, but it is more traditional in the sense of examining items in the agendas that preoccupied the minds of most of the philosophers and theologians before the sixteenth century (broadly speaking before the age of modernity). Some may even think that the 'freshness' of these discussions becomes even more pertinent and important in today's age, which is very similar in many of its aspects to the late Medieval and late Byzantine era: power struggles between the Church and the atheistic spirit of today's radical science occur often and become popular and intense (see for example the politically driven debates about the Church-State relations and Dawkins's neo-evolutionary cultural polemic), while social cohesion and harmony falls gradually apart from the buffeting of continuous avalanches of the 'neo'-barbarian financial tricks (whether neo-liberal or neo-socialist) and the subsequent losses in values and securities. A

1. I will discuss later how I see the Plato's agenda being continued through the work of Aristotle.

traditionally fresh approach to the writings of some of the pillars of the European core value system in logic and metaphysics, ethics, politics and aesthetics seems to be a good medicine for our illness-prone age.

Let us see further into some of the details of the cultural context behind a contemporary venture into the themes discussed in Bradshaw's book.

1.1 How the West got Aristotle wrong

One of the key questions regarding the diachronic reception of Aristotle is: Is it possible to de-contextualise and departmentalize Aristotelian thought? Is it possible to keep it locked in securely fastened conjunctions of thematic areas and currently well-financed project topics?

A related key question is: Why differentiate between an Aristotle of the East and an Aristotle of the West? This is related to the previous question in two senses, the first content-related and the second methodological. Firstly, the 'de-contextualisation' and 'departmentalization' sympathizers carefully like to disengage themselves from an Aristotle of the East or they try consistently to avoid it; they like to keep themselves snuggled up to their Humean pre-conceptions of a universal and methodologically sanitized philosophical meta-theory, one that is very close to the empirical sciences and/or mathematics. Secondly, they abhor the possibility that their Aristotle is not the 'true' Aristotle but a fictitious monster: a meta-theoretical Frankenstein of their own accord.

In this way, all scholars who recognize the value of these questions for a comprehensive understanding of Aristotle's work and its cultural significance for today's European civilization will find the agenda of the discussions that are within the covers of David Bradshaw's book not only interesting but worthwhile for further pondering and research.

But someone may insist: Why discuss the difference of the Aristotelian tradition in the East from the one existent in the West?[1] Why differentiate (as the title of David Bradshaw's book suggests) between the reception of Aristotle in the two frontiers of the previously homogenous (more or less) by culture, religion and civil administration Roman Empire? What is at stake here and why does it matter in contemporary studies of Aristotle to turn our attention to the East?

1. By 'East' here we usually mean Greece and other areas of the Aimos Peninsula, Holy Mt Athos, Constantinople, Black Sea, Caspian Sea and surrounding areas (with post fifteenth-century Russia dominated primarily from the 'West'), Asia Minor, Middle East, Egypt. By 'West' we usually mean Italy, Northern, Central and Western Europe, Spain and Portugal, North Central and Northern and Western Africa, and now the Americas, Australia and Asia. I do not wish to examine here the issue of whether this is a valid differentiation nor do I wish to make a statement regarding cultural geo-politics. I only wish to take it for granted and see where this leads us. I present in the following pages David Bradshaw's conception of 'East' and 'West' and their differences, and I wish to leave it at this for now.

Many contemporary attempts to interpret and unify the ideas expressed in the Aristotelian corpus into a more familiar (to us) system often forget the diachronic history of these ideas and/or past similar attempts, or they spend time and energy on placing an undue emphasis on their *Western medieval* reception (as if the Eastern discussions ended with Plotinus, Alexander of Aphrodisias, John Philoponus and Simplicius).[1]

We have to acknowledge that David Bradshaw's work fares far better than these attempts: it recognizes fully the diachronicity of Aristotle's reception in both East and West and cites as the chief differences between them not only linguistic norms and idiosyncrasies (Greek-East, Latin-West), but the significantly different cultural context in the development of the Aristotelian ideas and their commentary. In the West, faith and reason were regarded at odds and even enemies to a large extent,[2] while in the East, faith and reason were seen more compatible to each other and more unified in what we would see today as a metaphysically *holistic* attempt to describe and define the world, man, God and their inter-relations.[3]

So, the title of Bradshaw's book (*Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom*) wants to show exactly this: that both East and West have used Aristotle to justify their inherently different approaches to issues related to philosophy and theology (with the West seeing faith as opposing reason and the East seeing the two as compatible and able to be unified in a single research project).[4] It is this different use

1. For contemporary examples, see Ursula Coope's *Time for Aristotle* (Oxford, 2005); Frans de Haas and Jaap Mansfeld (eds), *Aristotle's On Generation and Corruption I* (Oxford, 2004); Richard Kraut (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford, 2006); Vasilis Politis, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Aristotle and the Metaphysics* (London, 2005); Christopher Shields, *Aristotle* (London, 2007). In the case of Plato we have similar examples; see Gerasimos Santas (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Plato's Republic* (Oxford, 2006); Lloyd P. Gerson, *Knowing Persons: A Study in Plato* (Oxford, 2003); Nickolas Pappas, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Plato and the Republic* (London, 2003, 2nd ed.).

2. Aquinas' dubious logical attempts at bringing the two into some kind of relation through natural theology and the famous "since therefore falsehood alone is contrary to truth, it is impossible for the truth of faith to be contrary to principles known by natural reason" (*Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 7), just prove how important it was at his time to solve the problem of their opposition…

3. For David Bradshaw's conception see his *Aristotle East and West*, p. x.

4. I am not claiming here that in the East there were no dissenting voices; there were a few who highlighted the differences between Platonic and Aristotelian approaches to key questions in metaphysics and ethics and the dangers of Christian Platonist and Aristotelian approaches. But these were few and not influential (for example see the case of Johannes Italus). The ones with the most influence in the East (for example the Cappadocians, St. John Damascene, St. Maximus the Confessor, Palamas and others) were quite successful in this: they highlighted the continuity and supported it well, providing a vision that made the marriage of faith and reason not only possible but

of the Aristotelian corpus that led them to formulate divergent cultures, thus producing a different philosophical and theological output.

However, one could point out here that while Bradshaw highlights this divergence and acknowledges the reason for this, he does not take sides on the very important issue of whether the reception of the East or the reception of the West is more close to a 'correct'[1] interpretation of key concepts and ideas in the Aristotelian corpus.

In a recent publication, I pointed out that contrary to many contemporary attempts to compare the discussion of *ousia* in the *Categories* with that found in the *Metaphysics*, the theory contained in the *Categories* is "a fully worked out theory of Being, indicating that its description is not and cannot be contained nor exhausted in the linguistic and logical expressions of it, but can equally well be expressed in the use of poetry and other rhetorical means of speaking about it".[2] I also pointed out that this thesis leads one to the controversial claim that Aristotle agrees with Plato on this issue.[3] I supported in my work the view that this claim is controversial only for an empiricist and analytical interpretation of the relevant Aristotelian passages, a claim which is predominant in the West and which I also found problematic. To support my view, I did not only use key texts from both Plato and Aristotle, but I also cited the views of later Byzantine philosophers (primarily Gemistos and Scholarios), who thought that the discussion of Being in Aristotle was not different from that of Plato, but that Aristotle's conception of Being was only carrying forward Plato's reasoning and agenda on Being. More importantly for my discussion of Bradshaw's work here, I found that:

> The theory about *ousia* presented in the *Categories* can be seen as consistent with the discussion of *ousia* presented in the *Metaphysics*, and that the Aristotelian theory of action can complement our understanding of it: action in the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* provides the link between humans and the world in terms of *ousia*. This also brings Platonic and Aristotelian theory of *ousia* even closer: Plato's *Republic* insists that ἐπιστήμη (true

inspirational for future generations of philosophers and theologians.

1. I mean by 'correct' here an interpretation that is closer to the original intentions of Aristotle and/or his followers, who systematized his ideas. And, by the way, I only claim proximity to the original intentions for a contemporary commentator: I am not claiming that any contemporary commentator can get the real intentions of Aristotle and his followers who composed/edited/systematized the Aristotelian corpus, only that he/she can approximate them to a perhaps greater degree than others. And I make this claim according to common sense criteria that have to do with comprehensiveness, lack of internal inconsistencies in the proposed system, and overall explanatory power.

2. Constantinos Athanasopoulos, 'Ousia in Aristotle's Categories', *Logique et Analyse*, 53/210 (2010): p. 212.

3. Ibid.

> knowledge) is related to ὄν (being) and ἀγνωσία (ignorance) to μή ὄν (not being), and this is coming very close to Aristotle's insistence in the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* (but also the theory of analogical epistemology in the *Metaphysics* Θ and Aristotle's discussion of Simonides' dictum in *Metaphysics* A) that the action that has not yet come about cannot be known, but only proposed through *Rhetoric* and expressed by *Poetry*, since it is its inexistence which makes it unknowable. [. .] The theory of the *Categories* makes both an ontological and a logical claim about *ousia* (and this is in agreement with Porphyry's interpretation of it, as well as Brentano's and other important commentators' appreciation of it).[1]

We see from the above discussion that the link between metaphysics and ethics is not via *ousia* and the epistemology of *ousia*, but through poetry and rhetoric and the different ways (in content and methodology) through which we come to know *ousia* as coming-to-be in this way.

We will see later how my findings can be applied to some of the specific problems that Bradshaw discusses, but suffice it for now to say that, on the basis of my research, the West has got a large part of Aristotelian Metaphysics wrong, and more specifically the discussion of *ousia* and *energeia*, or at least has not understood it within the parameters of a best possible interpretation of the relevant Aristotelian corpus that the East had achieved through a detailed, long and continuous study. This is so not only because in the East *Rhetoric* and *Poetry* was studied alongside the *Metaphysics* and the *Categories* (together with all other surviving Aristotelian corpus) but also because the traditional interpretational ties with the ancient commentators were never broken, with the Byzantines adding the final touches to a work-in-progress.

1.2 The Influence of Augustine in the West

In the Epilogue of his work, Bradshaw attributes this difference to the predominance of the influence of Augustine in the West (albeit with certain improvements in the Augustinian core theory by medieval Scholastics).[2] This influence included certain presuppositions about God that became culturally embedded in the West from the early medieval times. These presuppositions can be encapsulated in the following: God is simple and He is intrinsically intelligible (i.e., knowable by the human intellect), in two ways: a) through created intermediaries and b) through direct intellectual apprehension of the divine essence in this life (even though, through the strong influence of Aquinas, according to Bradshaw, this direction was 'quietly laid aside').[3]

1. Ibid., pp. 240–241.
2. Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, p. 265.
3. Ibid. I strongly disagree with such an appraisal; I consider Aquinas to further consolidate and augment the Augustinian influence in the West, trying carefully

Scholars who do not see the cultural embeddedness of Augustine in the West, and how non-Augustinian the East had become by the end of the fourteenth century sometimes claim that Palamas was far too Neo-platonistic in his metaphysics and in his interpretation and use of Aristotelian ideas, perverting or even distorting core Aristotelian theses in metaphysics to express what he saw as true Orthodox dogma on divine essence and divine energies (I have in my mind here Ierodiakonou[1], Rowan Williams[2] and John Milbank[3] among others).

In relation to these approaches to Palamas' theology and philosophy, I have to observe that looking at the East and some of its most profound contributions to the understanding of Orthodox dogma and Aristotelian metaphysics through a Western and culturally embedded Augustinian filter has never produced a clear and accurate estimate of the value of the East. And how can any such attempt produce anything good, when it is based on a disregard of the fact that Palamas and his faithful disciples have condemned in the strongest of terms the works and ideas of Augustine as sources of heresy? How can anyone claim that Palamas saw Aristotle through the (Neo-)Platonist eyes of Augustine, when at the same time he tries to distance himself and his theories from the pitfalls of Augustinian heresy on divine essence and divine energies, which he saw as being so evident in Barlaam's and his supporters arguments?

But let us examine in greater detail where exactly the problem lies in an Augustinian approach to the problem of the most appropriate interpretation and use of the Palamite writings on divine energies.

From the start, we have to observe that certain positions in Augustine's theology are considered in the East as almost heretical, especially in the form that these positions were used by the West,[4] and Augustine is considered most certainly by the followers and supporters of the Palamists as 'the root of all Western heresy'. This can be clearly seen primarily at the Ninth Ecumenical Council and its three volumes (based primarily on what is known in the West as *Hagioritic Tome*),[5] which were published in 1351 and condemned a series of Augustinian theses, embraced by Barlaam and others.

to purge it of its most unfortunate and weak theses.

1. Katerina Ierodiakonou (ed.), *Byzantine Philosophy and Its Ancient Sources* (Oxford, 2002), especially her paper 'The anti-logical movement in the fourteenth century', pp. 219–36.

2. Rowan Williams, 'The Philosophical Structures of Palamism', *Eastern Churches Review*, 9 (1977): pp. 27–44.

3. See Milbank's contribution in this volume and his response to Loudovikos's contribution in Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (eds), *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 156–64.

4. See primarily St. Photios, *Mystagogia* 67 (J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* – from now on *PG* – 102, p. 345). Also Saint Photios, *The Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Joseph P. Farrell (Brookline, 1987), p. 91.

5. *PG* 151, 689ff.

An example of such an Augustinian thesis, which can be considered as problematic and an ideological foundation for Barlaam's critique against the Hesychasts relates to what Moses saw at Mt. Sinai. Augustine claims:

> Let him, then, who has the strength whereby he can penetrate this secret with his mind's eye, so that to him it appears clearly, *either that the Father also is able, or that only the Son and Holy Spirit are able, to appear to human eyes through a visible creature*; let him, I say, proceed to examine these things if he can, or even to express and handle them in words; *but the thing itself, so far as concerns this testimony of Scripture, where God spake with man, is, in my judgment, not discoverable, because it does not evidently appear even whether Adam usually saw God with the eyes of his body; especially as it is a great question what manner of eyes it was that were opened when they tasted the forbidden fruit; for before they had tasted, these eyes were closed* [. . .].[1]

From the above passage, we can see that for Augustine the man can see only created things (belonging to visions or sounds), and not uncreated; and it is through these that man can know God (or, with a more charitable reading of these passages, Augustine cannot say for certain whether they are created or uncreated). His argument can be encapsulated as follows: "since it [the divine essence or divine substance, the Holy Trinity] is in no way changeable, it can in no way, in its proper self, be visible".[2]

However, the *Hagiorite Volume* (*Hagioritic Tome*), published in 1351, expresses the true Orthodox spirit thus:

> The intellect perceives one light, and the senses another. The senses perceive sensible light, which manifests sensory things as sensory. The light of the intellect is the spiritual knowledge inherent in intellection. Thus sight and intellect do not perceive the same light, but each operates to the limit of its nature in what is natural to it. When saintly people become the happy possessors of spiritual and supernatural grace and power, *they see both with the sense of sight and with the intellect that which surpasses both sense and intellect* in the manner that – to use the expression of St Gregory of Nazianzos – 'God alone knows and those in whom these things are brought to pass'.[3]

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1. In *De Trinitate* II, 10, par. 18 (my italics).

2. See *De Trinitate* III, ch. 11: The Essence of God Never Appeared in Itself [. . .] 'Wherefore the substance, or, if it is better so to say, the essence of God, wherein we understand, in proportion to our measure, in however small a degree, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, since it is in no way changeable, can in no way in its proper self be visible'.

3. *The Philokalia. The Complete Text.* Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, trans. G.E.H. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K. Ware (London, 1998), vol. 4, p. 424 (my italics).

From the *Hagiorite Volume* (which later was incorporated in the *Philokalia* texts and which traditionally was read at churches on the second Sunday of Great Lent after the Divine Liturgy, as a continuation of the liturgical celebration of the Triumph of Orthodoxy – on a Sunday that is still dedicated to the memory of Palamas), it is clear that Moses and the disciples of Christ during the Transfiguration saw both with "the sense of sight" and "with their intellect" that which "surpasses both sense and intellect", i.e., the divine energy, through which the Triune God reveals Himself and which is uncreated but visible.

We can easily see above that the Augustinian thesis about the invisibility of the uncreated was condemned by the Hagiorite Volume, and thus Augustine's theology is brought in question (even though not implicating directly Augustine himself by name).[1]

Let us conclude this section by saying that David Bradshaw's book fares far better than other attempts in making a clear distinction between the Aristotle of the East vs. the Aristotle of the West, and this allows not only for a richer understanding of key Aristotelian theses in metaphysics, but also for the more appropriate and accurate understanding of the hesychastic debates of the fourteenth century. But my discussion highlights the fact that Bradshaw's work still leaves the reader wishing for a more comprehensive and diligent account and evaluation of the Palamite theses in an attempt to provide a plausible and free from a Western pro-Augustinian bias interpretation of the relevant Palamite corpus.

2 Athens vs. Jerusalem: A False Dilemma?

There has been much discussion from the time of Tertullian[2] about Athens (which has the connotation of reason or philosophy) being the radical opposite to Jerusalem (which has the connotation of faith or theology). But is there a radical division and a dilemma between them or not? Fans of the radical division view are many and today can be found in both East and West (the cause of their appearance in the East today being the readiness of some of the late nineteenth and twentieth-century Greek Orthodox theologians to embrace the Western philosophical conceptions of God and Theology).[3] But in the late Byzantine Empire there were very few supporters of this idea, and traditionally in the East, no such radical

1. This is a point that is put forward primarily by Fr. John Romanides chiefly in his book *Franks*, *Romans*, *Feudalism*, *and Doctrine: An Interplay between Theology and Society* (Brookline, 1982). I indicate here that I agree with Fr. John Romanides in his argument, but I would like to point out that I do not wish to follow him in the rest of his polemic and rhetoric in the debates.

2. Cf. *De praescriptione*, vii.

3. In the way, for example, that Yannaras describes in Christos Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West: Hellenic Self-Identity in the Modern Age*, trans. P. Chamberas and N. Russell (Brookline, 2007).

division existed. This is not by accident. It is due to the very different ideas Byzantine philosophers and theologians had about philosophical method and the purposes and aims of philosophy(being influenced primarily by the very different way with which they received the Aristotelian corpus).[1]

David Bradshaw's book tries hard to contextualise the opposition of Athens to Jerusalem. This seems a good idea for one who is determined not to go against the tide, and who does not want to sound too extreme and reject the Western approach from the start of the discussion. But is this conflict really a conflict? The West believes it is. Bradshaw's book, even if not bold enough in its conclusions and approach, does make a positive contribution: it acknowledges that for the East there is no such conflict between Athens and Jerusalem or between faith and reason.[2] Bradshaw's conscious choice to focus the discussion on the issue of the divine energies highlights this difference of perspective.[3] If one considers sound metaphysics and theology of divine energies as the foundation upon which any sound metaphysics and theology can be built, then one realizes that the dilemma between Athens and Jerusalem is a false one. The dilemma exists only in so far one accepts an Augustinian understanding (in origin, aims and methodology) of the relation between theology and philosophy or reason and revelation. But one could have hoped for Bradshaw's wholehearted rejection of the Western approach on these topics; interpretational validity, simplicity and consistency are not only philosophical but theological virtues as well. And if we find that in a framework which attempts to respond to questions of a philosophical and theological character, all three are sacrificed at the altar of a widely accepted Kuhnian paradigm of philosophical and theological practice, then we should be bold enough to reject it wholeheartedly (even if it will raise a few eyebrows among our colleagues).

3 Divine Energies: Then and Now.

An important aspect of David Bradshaw's book is related to the issue of the correct interpretation of how the term 'divine energies' or 'θεῖες ἐνέργειες' is applied to the fourteenth-century debates. Bradshaw tries to examine this within the broader philosophical debates in ancient metaphysics. This is a positive contribution in the philosophical and theological study of the term,

1. See above my discussion about the departmentalization and de-contextualisation of Aristotle's corpus and in my cited work, Athanasopoulos, 'Ousia in Aristotle's Categories'. See also my 'Knowledge, Faith and Method: The Opposition of St. Gregory Palamas to the Agnosticism and the Relativism of Later Byzantine Philosophy', in K. Boudouris (ed.), *Greek Epistemology* (Athens, 2001), pp. 11–26 (in Greek); and 'Scholastic and Byzantine Realism: Absolutism in the Metaphysics and Ethics of Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Ockham and the Critique of St. Gregory Palamas', *Verbum*, 6 (2002): pp. 154–65 (in English).
2. Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, p. ix.
3. Ibid.

since to focus only on the Christian history of it's use would distort the relation of this term to other previous, similar attempts to produce a *methexis* of the divine. It would also help the supporters of the false dilemma between Athens and Jerusalem and the disassociation of philosophy and theology. However, Bradshaw chooses to connect the *ousia* debates with the *energeia* debates. This he does for what he considers important reasons: in the West the two need to be considered together, since otherwise much of the related discussion in Augustine (who considers God as *Ipsum Esse*, i.e., Existence Itself or Subsistent Being, *ipsum esse subsistens*)[1] has to be discarded as irrelevant, as does much of the related discussion in Aquinas (who also considers Him as *Actus Purus,* or that His essence is His act whereby He is as a boundless perfection of pure Being, not as in the strictly Aristotelian way of a determinate perfection of substantial form, i.e., with no division in Himself between acting/becoming and being/potentiality)[2] Bradshaw tries hard to find a common ground between the two debates in the West and he succeeds in this.

His investigation leads him to some rather interesting episodes in the interplay between the Neo-platonists and the Latins. His key references are to the concept of ἐνεργεῖν καθαρόν (to act exclusively or purely), found in the Anonymous Commentary of Parmenides. In this there is a direct connection between the beyond Being, and the being before being, and to Victorinus, who, according to Bradshaw, influenced Boethius and Aquinas in their peculiar understanding of God's *esse* and movement or procession from the Father to the Son.[3] However, here one might observe that according to St. Maximus the Confessor and the condemnations of Origenism at the Fifth Ecumenical Council, such a pursuit to bring together the discussions regarding *ousia* (or essence) and the discussions of *energeia* (energy) in the Triune God is futile for the East. The Palamite approach carefully avoided going down this route, and for a good reason. God does not create due to His nature nor due to His essence, and any attempt to unite essence and energy in the Triune God denies the truth affirmed by the Fifth Ecumenical Council that God creates due to His absolutely free will. This is the key point evident in Palamas' *Triads* (and in his *Letters to Akindynos* and other texts), where he stresses that divine energies are to be understood as activity (and thus uncreated) and not as acts (and thus created) See for example ἡ γάρ ἐνέργεια ἐνεργεῖται μᾶλλον ἤ ἐνεργεῖ, τό δέ Πνεῦμα τό ἅγιον παρεκτικόν καί μεταδοτικόν ὑπάρχει τῶν αὐτοῦ δωρεῶν[4]. This activity is due to God's free will and not His essence.[5]

1. *De Trinitate* V, 2, 3.
2. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, Q. 1, 2, 3, 8; *De Ente et Essentia* 4.
3. See Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, pp. 100–118.
4. In St. Gregory Palamas, *First Oration on the Procession of the Holy Spirit*, p. 234.
5. See St. Gregory Palamas, 7th *Antepigrafi* (Against Bekkos' *Epigrafai* in favour of the Latins): Οὐδείς γάρ τῶν εὐσεβεῖν ᾐρημένων διεσπαρμένην εἶναι νομίζει τῆς θείας φύσεως τήν θείαν χάριν καί τήν ἐνέργειαν˙ οὐ μήν ὅτι ἀχώριστός ἐστι τῆς θείας φύσεως ἡ θεία ἐνέργεια, παρά τοῦτο καί φύσις ἐστίν ἡ ἐνέργεια ταύτης

Thus, any direct association of the discussions of divine *ousia* with the discussions of divine *energeia* is potentially dangerously close to the condemned heresies of Origen and his followers, but also serves the purpose of proving right the accusations of Barlaam against Palamas regarding Messalianism. Bradshaw is careful not to affirm a heretical claim on this, acknowledging that God for Palamas *can do otherwise* but *cannot be otherwise*. However, Bradshaw's talk of self-manifestation and the relation of energies to the being of God, understanding the energies as manifestations of God's being or *ousia* is very close to Origen.[1] And his insistence that Palamas did not see how essence and energy are related in the inner life of the Trinity, and that somehow this is a shortcoming since Palamas does not speak of the Spirit as manifesting the energy of the Son, is I think missing the point of the absolute freedom in the persons of the Holy Trinity.[2] Even if we disregard Palamas' own text on this issue, what sort of freedom would the three persons of the Holy Trinity have if their behaviour and relation to one another depended on their essence? Would it not put limitations on their Absolute Freedom in some way?

The situation in relation to this aspect of Bradshaw's investigation becomes more complicated when a strategy is followed in which a Western interpretation of the Aristotelian corpus is adopted in the comparison between Aquinas and Palamas (focused primarily on the *Organon* and the *Metaphysics*).[3] Needless to say that I consider such a strategy seriously flawed, since (as I have shown above) it leads to serious misinterpretations regarding the Aristotelian corpus and its reception by the Byzantines. Why should we assume that what Aquinas understood as the Aristotelian theses in *Metaphysics* are the same as Palamas took them to be? And why should we compare the two on the basis of how the West (in the limited way that it understood Aristotle) saw Aristotle? Aristotle does not say much in the *Organon* and the *Metaphysics* about the entelechy in humans (there is some discussion about this in the *De Anima*[4] and of course in the ethical works, but also in *Rhetoric* and in *Politics*) and he does speak as if his Immovable Mover does not have this, but why should we not consider the absolute freedom of the person (following St. Maximus) as of key importance in our understanding of the persons of the Holy Trinity?

μηδέν διαφέρουσα (τοῦτο γάρ τῆς Βαρλαάμ καί Ἀκινδύνου δυσσεβείας ἐστίν)· ἡ μέν γάρ θεία ἐνέργεια ἐκ τῆς θείας φύσεώς ἐστι καί ἐνθεωρεῖται ταύτῃ κατά τούς θεολόγους, ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ ἔστι καθ᾽ αὑτήν, ἡ δέ θεία φύσις οὐκ ἐκ τῆς ἐνεργείας ἐστί καθ᾽ ἑαυτήν ἐστι καί τῶν θείων ἐνεργειῶν ἐστι πηγή.

1. See Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, pp. 272–5.

2. As expressed in many parts of the surviving corpus of St. Gregory Palamas and as it is evident, for example, in the 7th *Antepigrafi* against Bekkos (mentioned above).

3. See Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, pp. 1–2, and pp. 221–62.

4. Chiefly in Aristotle, *De Anima* II, ch. 2.

4 Further Possible Concerns from an Orthodox Philosophical and Theological Perspective

Further to the above concerns, I would like to add here some more in relation to particular problems in Bradshaw's strategical approach to the debates related to valid interpretations of key ideas of Palamas.

In trying to defend Palamas against some misguided criticisms that accuse him of pantheism and internal inconsistencies, David Bradshaw makes two moves: a) he considers the uncreated light *relative* or of a *relational* character: "it exists as a kind of mutual revelation and glorification within the Godhead, prior to the creative act";[1] and b) the unity of *energeiai* as a class consists in their being acts of self-manifestation of God.[2] But here a series of questions arise that Bradshaw's text does not elucidate.

In relation to the first move: Can the divine energies be a relation of sorts (in the metaphysical sense)? What exactly would the relational character of divine energies be if we accept that they are a relation of sorts? In their existence prior to the creative act, are they part of God's essence or not? If they are, then why claim that they exist as a different class of a metaphysical category? Why not just say that they exist in the creative act itself (coming into being by and through the very creative act)? If they are not, then what is their purpose? Surely God *knows* His glorification. To deny God of this would be equivalent to a serious contradiction in the Orthodox dogma and would lead to suspect metaphysics and epistemology (since energies now acquire a metaphysical and epistemological status far above and distinct from their origin). Also, where does God's absolute and personal *trishypostatos* (three-substantial) freedom fit in this relational character of energies prior to creation? Does God's essence and divine energies prior to creation necessitate the divine energies during and post creation? Is there a (necessary) distinction between what God is and what God does? Is there a distinction between God's *ousia* and God's appearance in the Transfiguration? To put it in more Palamite terms: Did Peter see God or the divine energy *as a relation* in the *trishypostaton* of God on Mt. Thabor? Did Peter see Jesus' body or not? Was what Peter saw the *trishypostatos* God or not? What is the difference between what Moses saw and what Peter saw? If there is no difference, then what does this say about the divine energies? (*PG* 151, 706ff). All these questions need an answer to make sense of the first move that Bradshaw makes, and pose a potential exegetical problem in his account of important Palamite theses.

In relation to the second move one can ask the following questions: Is the self-manifestation of God *necessary* or not? Is His freedom a *necessary*

1. Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, p. 273.
2. Ibid.

characteristic of His self-manifestation? Is this self-manifestation different from His essence? What is the role of the person of the Holy Spirit in this self-manifestation? Does it make the Holy Spirit less of a person in some sense? All these questions need an answer if one is to make an accurate appraisal of Bradshaw's contributions to the relevant debates.

5 Palamas' Appropriation of Aristotelian and Platonist Metaphysics

As a final part of our examination into the related issues, I would like to offer some personal thoughts about the way that Palamas appropriated, in his own Christian way, ideas from Aristotelian and Platonist metaphysics, and about the importance of absolute freedom in the persons of the Holy Trinity.

Firstly, it is important to note the mystical character of Palamas' work. But this has nothing to do with earlier forms of mysticism or non-Christian mystical attempts. According to Palamas, the vision of the uncreated light is not inferior to understanding, nor symbolic, nor semantic *of* God (as Barlaam and his supporters thought), but it is the very metaphysical and epistemological character of deification (or glorification – I am not concerned here with the linguistic term to describe the process, but with the process itself). One can see here some parallels in Aristotle – for example his discussion of freedom in relation to the second entelechy in man[1] (but not of the Aristotelian god or the Immovable Mover). One can also see in Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* a relevant discussion, but note that here ecstasy is not union; it can only lead to union but the union itself is not achieved (and for some Platonist scholars, it can never be achieved). Of course in Plato's *Theaetetus* we do have the theory of θεοειδές and θεοείκελον but this is not the same as a personal union with God, which Palamas most strongly confirms (even in the time before one's death). And Plato's theory of manic love or *Eros* in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* has nothing to do with the mystical and personal love for the Triune God found in Palamas and St. Symeon the New Theologian.[2]

In an earlier work, I have concluded that the key characteristics of the mystical philosophical and theological approach that can be found in the later Byzantine mystical fathers can be encapsulated in the following:

a) It cannot be described in terms of subjectivism vs. objectivism (in epistemology and ethics).

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1. See Ivo Bruns (ed.), *Alexandri Aphrodisiensis Praeter Commentareia Scripta Minora*, *De Anima Liber Cum Mantissa: Quaestiones: De Fato – De Mixtion* (Berlin, 1887), vol. 2. [*De Anima Liber Alter*], p. 103.

2. Phaedrus, 244a–249e; Symposium 207a–211c; Theaetetus, 176a–f; Timaeus, 90d; see also Philo, *Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres*, 249. See also Μπούσουλας, N. I., "Εκσταση, μύηση καὶ υπέρτατη εποπτεία στὸ Συμπόσιον του Πλάτωνος", *Φιλοσοφία*, 4 (1974) , σσ. 180–210; Μπούσουλας, N. I., "Εκσταση, μύηση καὶ υπέρτατη εποπτεία στὸ Συμπόσιον του Πλάτωνος Μέρος Β'", *Φιλοσοφία*, 5–6 (1975–1976) , σσ. 189–206.

b) The mystical experience is veridical (i.e., we can say when we have it), but it does not obey the laws of traditional logic and reasoning (there is a new epistemology involved).
c) Body and soul are not divided, but they are unified in the mystical union of God and man.
d) There is no intellectualism nor a conceptualism of any kind, because all reasoning, imagination and memory of sensory images is to be avoided; the organ of chief importance for the Orthodox mystic is the heart, not the mind. It is important to note in relation to this feature that Orthodox mysticism is not some kind of sensualism or emotionalism, since emotions and senses of the body are also to be avoided in the attempt to unite with the Triune God.
e) The mystical union can be achieved while alive and with the body. Later hesychasts, such as Palamas (1296–1359) and Nicholaos Cabasilas (1319/23–c.1391) emphasize that this union is achieved via the divine energies and not through some union with the divine essence. The Ninth Ecumenical Synod (1341–1351) made this new mystical idea part of the Orthodox dogma and bringing to the fore the mystical tendencies in the Orthodox Church.[1]

The above characteristics make the mystical philosophy and theology presented by the Hesychasts a unique episode in European intellectual history, one that is quite different from other Western (and Eastern) mystical endeavours.[2]

It is also important to stress that essentialism in the Palamite corpus is rejected. The disciples could *see* God but could not partake *of* His essence. So divine essence is something that remains apophatic, i.e., epistemologically and ontologically unknown and thus theologically and philosophically unusable (more or less). Knowledge of God is given via the divine energies, but the disciples could see "as far as they were able to bear it". Remember here the Troparion at the Feast of Transfiguration: "Thou

1. Constantinos Athanasopoulos, 'Food and Drink as Spiritual Nourishment in Orthodox Mysticism (Ps) Dionysius the Areopagite, St. Symeon the New Theologian and Nicholaos Cabasilas)'; the paper is translated into Russian and published in *Verbum*, 11 (2009): pp. 45–68.
2. Constantinos Athanasopoulos, 'The influence of Ps. Dionysius the Areopagite on Johannes Scotus Eriugena and St. Gregory Palamas: Goodness as Transcendence of Metaphysics', in Agnieska Kijewska (ed.), *Being or Good? Metamorphoses of Neoplatonism* (Lublin, 2004), pp. 319–341; 'Knowledge, Faith and Method: The Opposition of St. Gregory Palamas to the Agnosticism and the Relativism of Later Byzantine Philosophy', in K. Boudouris (ed.), *Greek Epistemology* (Athens, 2001), pp. 11–26 (in Greek). I admit that there is still a lot of work to be done to prove this for the entirety of the Western mystical (esp. Medieval) tradition.

wast transfigured upon the mountain, O Christ our God, showing Thy glory to Thy disciples *as far as they were able to bear it*. At the intercessions of the Mother of God, make Thine everlasting light shine forth also upon us sinners, O Giver of light, glory to Thee".

In his *Treatise on the Union and Distinction* (*Περί Ενώσεως και Διακρίσεως* 32), Palamas insists that there should be no discussion about the essence of God, since this [essence] is above all names and above all thought (αὕτη [οὐσία] γαρπαντάπασιν ὑπερώνυμός τε καί ἀνείκαστος ἐστι).[1] Palamas, in his *Treatise on the Dialogue between an Orthodox and a Barlaamite* (30–32), accuses Barlaam and his followers that by relating the essence of God to His divine energies they deny the Holy Trinity of both divine essence and divine energies. These two should be metaphysically and epistemologically distinct and unrelated (they cannot have the same metaphysical and epistemological categorical description, definition or group of relational properties).[2] And in his *Letter to Arsenius* (5), using relevant passages from St. Athanasius and St. Maximus the Confessor, Palamas insists that we can become deified but that we cannot be united with God's essence, and that we can know and see God but that we cannot see and know His essence.[3]

To further distance himself from medieval scholastic attempts to relate the discussion of essence to energy through a necessity of procession inherent in the divine essence, he highlights the fact that Christ never sends the Holy Spirit as if it was His or in some way emanating from His personhood. In elucidating the scriptural passage John 20:22 (ἐνεφύσησε αὐτούς και εἶπε, λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον) in his *Treatises to prove the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father* (*Λόγοι Ἀποδεικτικοί Περί τῆς Ἐκπορεύσεως τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος* B, 5–7), he emphasises that He did not say "take the Holy Spirit" (λάβετε τό πνεῦμα ἅγιον) only "take Holy Spirit" (λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον). This indicated that what he did with the disciples was to prepare them for the coming of the Holy Spirit, Who will come and grant according to His (the Holy Spirit's) free will His (the Holy Spirit's) own energies to them.[4] It is also important to have in mind in relation to this the Doxastikon of the Bending of Knees Prayers on the Sunday of Pentecost:

> Come, you peoples, let us worship the Godhead in three persons, the Son in the Father, with the Holy Spirit; for the Father timelessly begot the Son, co-eternal and co-reigning, and the Holy Spirit was in the Father, glorified with the Son;

1. Π. Γ. Χρήστου, επιμ., *Ιρηγορίου Παλαμά, Συγγράμματα*, τ. Β, (Θεσσαλονίκη, 1966), p. 93.
2. Ibid., pp. 193–4.
3. Ibid., pp. 318–9.
4. Π. Γ., Χρήστου, *Ιρηγορίου Παλαμά, Συγγράμματα*, τ. Α, (Θεσσαλονίκη, 1988), p. 82–3.

> one power, one essence, one Godhead, whom we all worship as we say: Holy God, who created all things through the Son, with the co-operation of the Holy Spirit. Holy Strong, through whom we have come to know the Father, and through whom the Holy Spirit came into the world. Holy Immortal, the Advocate Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son. Holy Trinity, glory to you.[1]

It may be that even though we cannot know the essence of the Triune God we can know the mode of His existence and this is a personal existence of three persons existing in love and freedom.[2]

It is clear from the above that there can be only absolute and unthinkable freedom within the Triune God, and this is evident also for the additional reason that within the Triune God there can only be relations of absolute and unconditional Love; relations that are incompatible and contradictory to relations of emanation, immanence and necessity due to essence (of Scholastic, Hegelian[3] or Neo-Hegelian origin). This is evident not only in the passages from Palamas that were discussed above, but also in the Doxastikon of the Pentecost (cited above) which is the very celebration of the birth of the Christian Church.

Concluding Remarks

In my short examination of some of the key positions that can be found in David Bradshaw's book, it is evident that Bradshaw's work should be cherished by all who long for a re-evaluation of the reception of Platonist and Aristotelian ideas in Christianity. It would also be very useful to all who think that a more serious and sober investigation into the later Byzantine advances in theology and philosophy is needed for a fresh start in contemporary metaphysics, ethics and epistemology. More work of course is needed to spell out in detail the ramifications of a truly Orthodox approach in spirit and in methodology, philosophy and theology. Perhaps the book can provide a useful starting point for a more Christological and Trinitarian approach to some of the key questions that philosophy and theology, metaphysics, ethics and logic have to come to terms with in contemporary philosophy. Through our investigation it became necessary to see the wider context of the systematic interpretation of the Aristotelian and Platonic corpus for a correct evaluation of the late Byzantium

1. Translation into English by Fr. Ephrem Lash, from his Anastasis.org site: http://www.anastasis.org.uk/PentAll.htm, accessed 14/7/2011.

2. See for a relevant discussion Christos Yannaras, *Elements of Faith* (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 26–31, 42–5. I am not particularly happy about the criteria of personhood that Yannaras introduces though; see his 'self-consciousness' and his 'otherness'. Why should the same criteria exist in humans and in the Triune God?

3. See Hegel's, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, par. 166; 175, 186; Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind*, par. 436A; and Fichte's, *Foundations of Natural Right*.

advances in the (mystical) metaphysics and epistemology of Epiphany and Theophany. It also became necessary to unite the metaphysics and ethics of God in a more profound way than many contemporary approaches to the problems of the existence of God and related theodicies allow: an allowance for an absolute and personal freedom of (and in) the Triune God is essential for an appropriate understanding of His divine energies. But I think the general drive of this work to look in the East for an answer is more important today than at other times, when similar Roman-Catholic and Protestant attempts become more and more widely available in both West and East. It is about time the East received a more systematic and comprehensive study than the ones currently on offer.